Below is a collection of tips that I found useful for improving COVID safety in the classroom as a TA. Do as much as you can & have the power to do (which, understandably, is probably not everything).

1. Lead by example - **wear a good mask**, not just to class, but in public in general, especially since your students are probably also your classmates and may run into you outside of class (and since COVID isn't just in class :)).

2. If you are required to staff any class sessions in-person, **open windows** in the classroom (if weather and air quality are good) and plug in/turn on **HEPA filters** if there are any in the classroom. Even better if you **do these things conspicuously** so students and other staff see you and are forced to at least confront reality for a moment.

3. If you have bulk quantities of **free masks** of any kind, lay them out at the classroom entrance/checkin table. If possible, write "Masks" with arrows in big letters on a piece of paper pointing to the boxes so they are **prominently visible** to people coming into the room. If you are the one lecturing/presenting, write something like "Masks at the entrance" on your cover slide that is projected on the screen; maybe even also write that on any whiteboards/chalkboards in the room.

4. If you lead your own discussion section, include some **language in your intro email** about masks/COVID/long COVID. An example:
   "Although I can't legally require masks in class, I **strongly encourage you to wear a well-fitting mask in class** (at least a 3-layer surgical, even better if you have a KN95, KF94, or N95+), both to protect yourself from COVID/long COVID and to be considerate of classmates who are immunocompromised or just don't want to get sick. Tying into that, though Code Review attendance is required (and helpful :)), absences due to illness are always excused. If you feel sick or test positive for COVID/flu/RSV/strep/anything contagious, just email me to get excused from Code Review - using your brain while sick is usually counterproductive."

5. Make it clear on Day 1 that there is a procedure for students who test positive for COVID, and have a dedicated section of your course website describing the procedure. Example procedure:
   a. Have them fill out a no-proof-required form indicating that they have tested positive for COVID and will be excused from work/have deadlines extended while they isolate and recover.

i. Example form description: “This form is for [course name] students in isolation or quarantine. Please note that you are not required (or encouraged, since working while COVID-positive increases your risk of long-term complications) to take part in these activities: your health takes priority and is a suitable reason to miss labs, etc. If you have any questions, or there is any additional way that we might be able to support you, please don't hesitate to contact the course staff.”

ii. Example form questions: name, student ID/email, date of positive test, date of scheduled end date of isolation (emphasize that this can be extended upon re-completing the form if you are still symptomatic or testing positive), would you like to do xyz course activities remotely, would you like to connect with other students also in isolation who would like to do xyz course activities remotely, anything else we should know to better support you

b. Send them links to virtual participation in course activities (emphasize that it’s optional and that health should take priority) and to recordings + notes of any lectures/discussion sections/labs missed. At least one TA should monitor the virtual class sessions at any given time.

6. Have at least one **virtual office hour** session per week, and have regularly monitored EdStem/Piazza/other discussion board where students can **get help asynchronously** so that they don’t feel like their only way to get help is in-person office hours. Be the one to hold these hours and monitor the discussion board if you can. Let students know that your email is open for asynchronous help as well.

7. Provide recordings of all lectures, labs, and discussion sections, as well as written notes that cover approximately the same material, so students don’t feel pressured to come to class while sick.

8. Be generous with the excused absence policy if attendance is monitored, especially with medical excuses - “I haven’t tested but I’m having cold-like symptoms” is a valid excuse for missing class with no further proof needed!

9. If you know of someone who attended a class session and later (within ~72 hours, longer if you remember them being symptomatic) reported a positive COVID test, send an exposure notification to all students who were at the class sessions that this person attended (a reason to **take attendance**, even if it’s not

graded). Example email template:

Subject: [Course Name] Notification of COVID Exposure at Lab [NUMBER], [MM/DD/YYYY] [TIME]
Body:
Hello!
If you are receiving this email, our records show that you attended Lab [NUMBER] at the [LAB TIME] time slot on [DAY OF WEEK, MONTH DAY, YEAR]. The staff has just received a report of an attendee at this lab session who tested positive for COVID-19 today. Since you all were in a shared indoor space with this individual, you were most likely exposed to COVID. As such, the CDC protocol is to take a COVID test as soon as you can, monitor yourself for COVID-related symptoms, and wear a well-fitting mask in public for the next 10 days. If you don't have masks on hand, your dorm/house's security desk should have some (they should also have antigen tests), and the engineering building front desk also has an ample supply. If you test positive and need extra time/support on the upcoming assignments/exams, feel free to email [somebody on the course staff, as applicable]. Thanks!

10. Keep a pulse on the discussion boards/office hours, even if you're not the main person monitoring them. Look out for signs of brain fog/exhaustion and consider offering those students some extra support (extensions, even just a checkin email, etc). There isn't really a checklist for this, but an example where you might want to raise the alarm would be if a student was doing really well in the first part of a course and then is suddenly asking questions on the discussion board about basic concepts that they definitely understood a few weeks ago & couldn't have gotten this far in the course without understanding. I had one such case this past spring, and upon checking the isolation form responses for my class, I saw that this student was 9 days out from a positive COVID test. I also saw 10+ cases of this in my final office hour session about a week after what I suspected was a superspreader midterm exam. If able, bring these things up at staff meetings - you'll most likely be ignored upfront, but it'll plant a seed in some people's heads and you might be surprised that some of them turn around a few months later and say "hey you were right."

11. Also pay attention to this if you have a say in the final grades for the class - if someone was doing really well in the first half and then their performance significantly dropped, check if they had a COVID infection sometime in the middle of the semester, and consider reweighting the course grading scheme to be more lenient toward students in these situations. For example, pre-2020, a lot of courses with two exams/papers would put more weight on the second exam

than the first one, with the thought being that students gained more knowledge/skills as the course went on and should do better on the second exam/paper. However, long COVID tends to get worse, not better, over time, especially if a student is continuously keeping up with the demands of a university course schedule such that they’re not getting enough rest upon being infected, so consider adjusting the scheme to take the best of the two exams/papers.